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Romance
of the Willow

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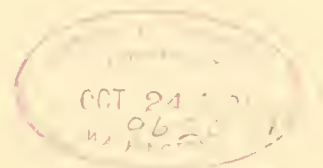
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A
ROMANCE OF THE WILLOW.

BY

MARIE WOODRUFF-WALKER
(CLIFTON ESDALE).



NEW YORK
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A ROMANCE OF THE WILLOW.

The Mandarin with haughty mien uprose
While wrathfully he cursed his absent foes.
"Wide lands and gold are mine," in rage quoth he,
"Yet from the court I now must quickly flee
"For storms are gathering here, I well may dread
"Their crushing force on my unsheltered head.
"Perchance if one had right, he might defy
"His enemies, but an accursed spy
"Unto the Emperor will the tale convey,
"Unless ere willows bloom I haste away ;
"Yes, fly ! to save myself disgrace; aye, worse !"
Again the bamboo vibrates with his curse.

* * * * *

Pleading his cause, he urged his deep desire,
Again to worship tablets of his sire.
His Majesty, the *Dragon Emperor*, heard
The filial love expressed in every word
The Mandarin spoke ; bade him that very day
Unto his provinces to start away.

How fair it was, that country seat ! a place,
Spacious and large, where willow, peach and mace,

Grew in luxuriant sweetness ; casting shade
O'er fair magnolias, whose rich perfume made
The air fall languorous, with a rythmic sense
Of popped drowsiness, to inspire intense,
Sweet waking dreams that bend and sway like these
Bright golden orbs that stud the orange trees.
They move and beckon 'neath the weight of some
Rich feathered, fire-backed pheasant rendered dumb,
Intoxicated by the wealth of all
These aromatic odors ; faint its call,
And then the silence, eloquent of life,
Speaks clearer than the world's discordant strife.

I

'Twas on an island in the great Po-Yang,
Where to the lotus blooms the waters sang,
There rippled 'neath the windows opened low,
Laving its walls with ever constant flow.

To this abode the Mandarin now came,
With all his household and his ill-got fame.
His private secretary had the place in charge
And his accounts, his business being large.

The household still was robed in funereal white
For one whose soul had taken its eternal flight.
His wife no longer with regret mourned he ;
Not so the Mandarin's daughter. Young Quong-Si
Still to the sacred-room would oft repair,
And there unnoticed pour forth her despair,

Before the ancestral tablets ; as she dwelt
On all the beauty, sweetness, goodness, felt
How sad it is a mother's love to miss ;
Although that mother dear had gone to bliss.
A foreigner of noble birth was she,
The yearned-for mother of the maid Quong-Si.
Thus before shrine the maid's rebellious heart
With anguish at her deeper loss would smart.
Despising other women who knew naught
Of all the wondrous lore her mother taught
Her to believe and reverence. '

Thus it chanced
That little Quong-Si's eyes with wisdom glanced,
As never maids before in Chinese lands
Had dared to question, e'en in heart, commands
That held the woman bound in slavish chains
As chattels of their lords like other gains ;
So Quong-Si ever mourned the mother wise,
And by her shrine the tears rained from her eyes.

But day by day the loveliness around
Soothed her young sorrow ; till no bird was found
So blithesome, merry, musical, as she
The great man's daughter.

Thus at last Quong-Si
(Her hand-maid with her) wandered o'er the isle,
And gathered blossoms, or paused merrily to smile
Into a placid inlet's crystal face,
To see her own reflected. Till a race
Of finny gold-fish, hastening (to be fed
From her small hand) made tiny rings, which led

Each other to the lotus-guarded shore,
Where each in tiny turbulence could pour
Its small self out around the lotus, fair,
Which, stirred, gave forth its perfume on the air.
Then sometimes to the neighboring isle went she,
Together with her hand-maid ; rice and tea
Were cultivated by the gardener ; he, right glad
To see these maids, brought forth the best he had
Of fruits and candied-watermelon-seeds ;
Offering e'en his life for any needs
The happy young Quong-Si might ever know ;
Then to the hand-maid with his face aglow
He'd dedicate the life given back in glee,
By merry, dark-eyed, lady fair, Quong-Si.

While wandering thus at evening (where the shade
Fell in warm, amorous veiling) with her maid,
Quong-Si paused 'neath an orange tree to rest.
She watched the great red-moon lift high her crest
From out the lake's still bosom, glints of light
Were quickly scattered by the spirit Night,
Until the moon seemed seated on a throne,
From whence she reigned unrivalled and alone.
While flower-like stars, and star-like flowers all gave
Their best of light and perfume ; each a slave
That lived but to its Queen's behest obey,
And lose its quickened sense at break of day.

Then Quong-Si, seated in the spicy grove,
Let winsome fancy lead her far to rove ;

She thought her little life might hap'ly glide
For ever on that moonbeam, then she sighed
And dreamed again. As like a chant she sang
A sweet weird ditty.

Silently had Chang,
Her father's private secretary, come
Into the garden's shade ; he stood like one
Before ancestral shrine—as still was he
As hapless Daphnë buried in the tree.

Long seasons had this learned youth from far
Gazed on his master's daughter, as some star
The unwearied scientist its course will scan
With eager watchfulness. Spirit and man
More distant and obscure to him appear
Than does the Heavenly body. But as near
As Chang ere this had to his mistress come
Was watching from his window, now made dumb
By finding he was close beside Quong-Si,
While unobserved by her, he fain would flee.
Alas ! like Daphnë's, helpless seem his limbs ;
His arms hang nerveless, a branch the moonlight dims,
And Quong-Si, rising, gives a startled cry,
Then droops her lovely eyes, no one is nigh,
While Chang (his voice recovering at the sound)
Prostrates himself upon the flowery ground.

" Arise," then quoth Quong-Si in gentle tone,
But Chang was rigid as a man of stone.
" If I mistake not, this should be brave Chang.
" My father's private secretary ; rang

"Of late the converse with the lore that he
Had mastered"—Was it indeed Quong Si?
Thought Chang; as on the ground he inhaled the breath
Of broken blooms, which render up in death
A fragrance sweeter than to life belong,
As swan-like welcoming lifelessness with song.

So Chang in humble murmur thus replied:
"Great lady, daughter of a house of pride,
"Peerless in beauty, unsurpassed in wealth,
"Unequaled in all graces, Chang by stealth
"Hath watched thee passing 'neath the flowering trees
"And in thy dainty ear a thousand pleas,
"He ever longs to make, that thou wilt spare
"His life—Alas, how hopeless is his prayer!"
"Nay, say not so, but rise and tell me how
"Quong-Si can aid you; and I here avow,
"That she will help you—helpless though she be,
"You have the word of—of your friend Quong Si."
The maiden hesitated, downward drooped her eyes,
So strange it seemed. Was it alone surprise
That fluttered the young heart within her breast
And lent so sweet a sense of being blest?
We may not guess, for here the hand-maid brought
A message from the Mandarin, who sought
His daughter.

In a bamboo balcony
The willow blossoms dropped their flowers to see
The silkens curtains and the cushions fine,
Where the great Mandarin pleased to sip his wine

Quong-Si long lingered on her thoughts of one
So far beneath her rank that surely none
Could foresee danger, so far removed was he,
The secretary Chang, from great Quong-Si.

II

At last, the Mandarin's affairs arranged,
(How should he know his daughter's heart had changed
From child's to maiden's?) suddenly there sprang
On the young lovers a deep woe ; for Chang,
No longer needed by the Mandarin,
Was summoned to his presence ; in a din
Of sounding phrases he was told to go.
With dazed thought, with faltering step, and slow,
Chang turned and staggered to the open door ;
Then paused and bowed him prostrate to the floor.
"Great Lord, most mighty Mandarin, I pray
"That thy most humble servant yet may stay
"And do thy work ; no more than this I ask,
"Being 'neath thy roof is payment of the task."
The Mandarin both men and manners knew,
Nor imagined for an instant Chang was true
In what he said ; devotion to his cause
He ne'er had found, save by enforcing laws.
While thinking thus his jetty eyes flashed fire,
His yellow face contorted in his ire.
While quickly worked his cunning brain, quoth he
Unto himself : "So ; we will wait and see."
Then to the prostrate secretary spoke,
"Truly, devotion lighteneth every yoke,

"And since you would remain with us ; consent
"You have from me." Chang rose and joyful lent
His ear to business plans of the estate,
Until the Mandarin said: "The hour grows late;
"Withdraw."

All stars above were sending rays
To light his path, as by familiar ways
Chang stealthily proceeded; wild his heart
As at each rustling twig he gave a start.

Beneath the willow tree he paused where all
Was hushed and silent; like a strange bird's call,
He whistled low three times, then listened near ;
With strained acuteness he could faintly hear
The bending of the bamboo rail above ;
"Quong-Si, my lotus flower ! Quong-Si, my love !
"Tell me that thou art near, that thou art well,
"That thou still lovest me ; quickly, sweetest, tell
"Me all these things, or driven from thy side
"I'll hide my madness in yon rolling tide."

"As fall the blossoms when I touch this bough
"Upon thy head, dear love, ah ! that is how
"My waking thoughts, my sleeping dreams and all
"I hope, I think, I do, I am, but fall
"Upon the shrine, which sacred to thy name
"Within my heart doth dwell, where burns love's flame.
"Yet, my beloved, strange as it may seem,
"There hovers o'er me still a fatal dream.
"As yon funereal cypress sighs of woe,
"E'en so my loving heart foresees some foe,

"Which threatens us with sorrow. Oh ! my lord !
"Give me a ray of comfort ; for a horde
"Of deep and subtle fears assail my heart ;
"Assure me, Chang, that we shall never part."
As thus the maiden spoke, with earnestness,
Chang felt a strange misgiving—

"Sweet, confess
"That if aught of misfortune fall on me
"No man shall e'er call 'bride' my own Quong-Si."
Without a moment's hesitancy then,
The maiden, deftly, from her garment's hem,
A jewelled bead broke off, and hid it in
The chalice of a blossom; small and trim
The girlish form stood out against the sky,
As with a loving word, a gentle sigh,
She bent the burthened bough until in reach
Of him she loved.

"As blooms the fragrant peach,
"E'en so my soul doth blossom in thy smile ;
"Being absent from thee, hours I vainly wile.
"Should'st ever doubt, oh, Chang, my constancy,
"Send but this rubied bead. I swear Quong-Si
"Will join the ages, the gold-leaf suicide
"Shall take me to the tomb ere I be bride
"To any but my noble, lordly Chang."
Just then the hand-maid to her mistress sprang :
"Oh dearest lady, some one stands without
"And watches thee. I pray thee do not doubt,
"For I have seen the tallest leaving teas
"Swayed back and forth—"

"Nay, 'tis the evening breeze,"

Said Chang, who heard these words from Quong-Si's door,
And turned aside the shrubbery to explore.

"Alas ! alas ! My lord, I foresaw woe ;

"Now list, the funereal cypress—!"

"— 'Tis the flow

"Of waters in the lake thou hearest, dear."

These loving reassurances the fear

Of Quong-Si soon allayed ; and when she heard

The fluttering wing of some belated bird

She laughed a noiseless laugh at her late fears.

Laugh on, sweet maid, the time soon comes for tears.

* * * * *

How mellow, amorous, soft and sweet is night

And Chang in thought late watched the rosy light

Shed by the lantern in Quong-Si's bamboo,

And blessed the Joss of lovers. Deep and true

Was Chang's warm heart : And all the wealth of lore

Of ancient times, he challenged forth to pour

Their richest virtues, bravery and love

Unto his lady's praise ; so far above

All other maids to him seemed young Quong-Si,

So radiant in youth ; her constancy

He prized with all the depth his being owned,

But, hist ! again the funereal cypress moaned.

III.

Again the morning waked the sleeping flowers,

Where languorous fragrance drank the dew. The showers

Wept in the night-time by some distant star
Engulfed in yon white nebula, its bar
Of golden dust, the Empyrean to divide,
Where the sad Pleiad moaning, wept and sighed.

* * * * *

As oft as comes the morn, so oft mankind
Awakes from restlessness or woe, to find
The world more goodly than in shadowed night
To him it seemed, so hideous is the blight
Of darkness linked to a corroding care
Blasting the watcher with a cold despair.
Then bright-eyed morning comes and shows a face
All dimpling o'er with loveliness and grace ;
Till midnight 'bodings of approaching ill
Are crowded out for peace the void to fill.
Most blithesome, joyous, boundless seems the earth,
To ring in soft vibrations with its mirth.
Yet sadder (than the night time hours of care
When palpitating starlight throngs the air,
And morning's touch dispels the phantoms grim)
Is waking from sweet sleep, to find a dim
Half unformed sense of sorrow ; like a stone
The heart sinks heavy ; with a bitter moan,
The yesterday's old burden rolls again
Upon the soul ; unwelcome is the strain
Of happy birds ; ah ! would that one might sleep ;
And, sleeping, join oblivion's ocean deep,
There 'neath forgetful waters bear away
No bitter sense, flung back from yesterday.
Ne'er to again the sparkling world behold,
Which mocks our sorrow with her beauties bold.

Thus wakened by the early thrush, Quong-Si
Her drooping eye-lids lifted ; why had she
So sad a memory within her heart ?
With quivering lips she rose to break apart
The thread which held her to a painful dream ;
And still, though quite awakened—did it seem
That apprehension lurked in every thought,
That e'er before with tenderness was fraught ;
Again she fain would hap'ly fall to sleep ;
And so forget this strange desire to weep.

IV

The fatal day had dawned when Chang was bade
To quit the island's shore. The Mandarin had
The meetings of the lovers scented out.
While lurking in the garden, beyond doubt,
Had heard Quong-Si her maiden-heart outpour
To a poor youth, whose only wealth was lore
And love ; yet richer far indeed was he
In their possession with his own Quong-Si
Than many a mighty lord with titles grand
And glittering gold, or an extensive land.

* * * * *

The weary days passed on ; Chang was not far,
But on the gardener's isle. The watery bar
His eager gentle glance would leap ; his gaze
Then rested on Quong-Si in distant maze.

Listless the maiden wanders o'er the isle ;
She sighs and weeps ; no more the waters smile

At her reflection, but show saddened lines
 On her sweet face. And Chang thought, "She repines
 "For me, alas ! unworthy though I be,
 "Would I alone could suffer ; not Quong-Si !
 "Alas ! alas ! such ne'er may be the case ;
 "In all the vastness of the human race,
 "As in the garden, not so mean a tree
 "But casts a shadow ; so it is with thee,
 "O, man ; no moan but echoes in some heart,
 "No bitter tear but in a life apart
 "From thine a deep wound-scar is wrought ;
 "No sigh was ever lost ; some night wind brought,
 "Its answer back, to make us mad with woe,
 "And yet ecstatic be that it is so."
 Thus Chang would muse. The hand-maid came one day
 And in much glee told Chang she had found a way
 For him to see Quong-Si each day an hour,
 Then told him of a fair but secret bower.
 When Chang would fain have thanked her she was gone,
 To reappear but at the morrow's dawn.
 "I pray you thank me not for this, kind sir,
 "For ever all my life is but for her ;
 "If I could give one joy to our Quong-Si,
 "Believe me, sir, 'twould be reward to me."

* * * * *

Thus, happy days and weeks and months passed by,
 The lovers daily meeting ; sweet and shy
 Quong-Si would listen to the future's plans,
 While Chang so earnestly the pathway scans,
 To wealth and glory for his sweetheart fair,
 That nothing seemed too difficult to dare.

With glowing eye, and graceful gesture free,
He laid his plans before his love, Quong-Si ;
But she, with tender glance would still repeat,
" Ah, leave me not, beloved ; no great feat
" Could e'er compensate for the woe I feel
" At thought of separation."

Chang would kneel

And tell her that 'twas all for her he longed
To prove his place 'mid great ones ; else he wronged
Himself and her whom most he prized on earth ;
He fain would work, that he might prove his worth—
If not of her, yet of the rank she bore.
And thus the happy tide they would outpour
Of mutual love and pride, the all that gives,
The blessedness of love, to each who lives
To join his heart to one so like his own,
That first he learns to know he was alone.
Then, this life enters his ; no longer now
Shall isolation crown his thoughtful brow.
But o'er him shines a lofty glow that he
Can ne'er forget, nor dark, nor lonely be.
Then two warm hearts with happiness are brave,
Each proud as monarch, humble as the slave.

While yet Chang lingered hidden in the grove,
And saw each day the object of his love,
Again the cunning Mandarin discovery made.
Then awful was his wrath, nor long delayed.
He cursed his daughter, locked her safe within
A suite of rooms, away from friend or kin,

Which overhung the lake, so no one could
Approach the bamboo where the lady stood.
So lonely, sad and woeful was her mien,
As listlessly she viewed the placid scene,
That e'en the finny friends beneath the tide,
The butterflies that with each other vied
To send more radiant tints to all the bowers
Than fair Proserpine while strewing flowers,
And glorious birds whose plumage was aglow
As though just sprinkled by the bright rainbow.
Yes, all of these : fish, butterfly and flowers,
The rainbow pledge, gay epilogue of showers,
And winged bird that came from o'er the tide,
The wimpling wavelets gently, fondly sighed,
The zephyr pregnant with a spicy smell,
That fanned her cheek and murmured "all is well,"
The distant star, so well beloved of yore,
The far-off azure line of yonder shore.
Each one of these gave her the best it had—
Yet vainly!— for the maiden still was sad.
And daily sadder grew, until the rose
Upon her cheek no more in color glows.
Her hand-maid was dismissed, and she alone
Had power to comfort, yet none heard a moan,
For Quong-Si's hope seemed dead : a mortal fear
Had entered her deep soul.

 The frozen tear,
Which might have flowed and washed the woe away,
Became an icy needle, that by day
Pierced her sore heart, where tears of blood were shed,
As ever more she mourned : " My Love is dead."

V

While in the sorrow of her broken youth,
 Not knowing aught of what might be the truth,
 She felt the maddening horror of suspense,
 In which all womankind, with heart strings tense,
 In every clime, in every age and place,
 Lives its sad life of sacrifice. The race
 Excitement swayed, thinks not of those who wait
 With anxious hearts and strained nerves—Too late
 The news of victory or of loss appeals ;
 The watching eye, the listening ear He seals,
 That welcome Angel, *Death*. Mark this, oh, man,
 And then give all the sympathy you can ;
 Remembering that 'tis harder far to stay
 With coldly clasped hands and watch the gray
 Days melting each in each, and not to know
 Whether the tide of life shall ebb or flow,
 Than in the midst of carnage on the field,
 Your life for honor in all glory yield.
 And so Quong-Si, not knowing aught without
 Her small bamboo, no longer felt a doubt
 That Chang was dead. And lo ! the maid was changed
 While ever to her lover memory ranged.

Was it the spirit of her mother fair
 With glints of gold light in her dusky hair—
 So wise and witty, versed in classic lore,
 Her mother who had come from some far shore,
 Had she perchance imbibed rebelliousness
 From that sweet spirit ?

Ah ! she could not guess

From whence had come these alien thoughts of him
Who as progenitor she owed the worship. Dim
Were Quong-Si's ideas, yet for her wicked sire
She felt no love ; but pity, loathing, ire,
And in an ecstasy of fright she went
Before her mother's tablet, where she spent
Long hours invoking help from every god ;
Craving to love and kiss the uplifted rod ;
Yet all in vain.

Came once the Mandarin
Unto his daughter ; cursed that she was thin
And pale. Then quickly changed to merry mood
And bade her laugh, for that she would be wooed
And wed by one, a mighty Tai-Jin, who
Was rich and great (though twice her years, t'was true), ;
" And, furthermore," the Mandarin then said,
" The willow now doth blossom ; when the red
" Of peach-buds first shall show upon the tree,
" On that same day thy nuptials I decree."
Quong-Si then wept and plead ; of no avail !
The Mandarin stormed and cursed,

" What! shall a pale,
" Weak, puny, crying girl my will oppose ?
" By every Joss ! I swear I'll pay in blows
" This insolence upon that villain's hide ;
" That you and he shall learn I'll be defied
" By none ! You heard me, girl, by *none*, I said,
" And understand, the Tai-Jin you shall wed ;
" And when he hither comes, paint up your face,
" Nor let me hear that whining voice disgrace

" My offer of my daughter to this duke ;
" Or by my life you'll find a worse rebuke
" Than words."

He went. The maiden, left alone,
Sank to the floor ; yet one word did atone
For all the rest—" Surely, Chang lives," she said,
" Else had the Mandarin told me he was dead."
From that morn on, the days to poor Quong-Si
Passed westward o'er the lake ; scarce noted she
Their flight, the sunrise or the sunset's rays,
For hour by hour her patient, listless gaze
Was centered o'er her balcony ; for there,
A persevering peach-tree seemed to dare
What nothing else had ventured ; straight and strong
Its branches sent, the prison house along.
And where it forked, a bird's nest then appeared.
The birdlings chirruped all day and nothing feared.
" A happy omen comes, oh, bird, with you,
" Refreshing to my heart as is the dew
" To day-worn flowers that, drooping in the night,
" Drink dew's ambrosial nectar, and with light,
" Behold ! they wanton in the perfumed bowers.
" But then, alas, they still are only flowers,
" Whilst I a *maiden* am, beloved by one
" Who is my god of day, my heaven, my sun,
" My golden morning, and my crimson eve,
" The amber of the unshed tears (that grieve
" The roses from my cheek), the storms which swirl
" Into my heart the grain of sand, a pearl
" Of Heavenly beauty to my life bequeathed.
" Oh, gain of loss ! Oh, loss of gain ! That seethed

"About my inmost citadel of love,
"And hung its beauteous ensign far above."

VI

As Quong-Si lingered on her terrace small,
Above the lake, she noted not the fall
Of shadowy, star-gemmed evening's obscure veil,
When sudden she beheld a tiny sail
Float towards her, on the restive Po-Yang's tide
Which 'neath her terrace then did softly glide.
Swift, with the dexterous use of parasol,
She lifted from the wave a junk, with all
The tiny fittings; a cocoanut's half shell,
With miniature of sail. This bark the swell
Of waves had wafted to her feet. Indeed,
She scarce could see, for joy, the rubied bead,
Which gleamed a fiery, shaft-like, burning dart,
And waked responsive echoes in her heart.
For well she knew whose hand had set afloat,
Upon the restless lake, the tiny boat.
Beneath the jeweled bead Quong-Si espied
A bit of vellum, and aloud she cried.
The old duenna heard the cry of joy
And limping, hastened in—

 " Why dost annoy

"The evening air, wild girl, with such a shout?
"Tell me this instant what 'twas then about;
"Or I'll to the Mandarin and tell him that
"He should no longer house so vile a brat!"
Quong-Si was blushing at the old dame's word,
And trembling, too, like some poor frightened bird,

Lest in her ample sleeve, where she had hid
The tiny boat, ere she could safely rid
Her of the old hag's presence, she should spy
Her new-found treasure ; with a quivering sigh
Quong-Si then said,

“ At dusk I fell asleep,
“ And wakening thus, so strange my dream ; so deep
“ I still was dreaming—and knew naught, yet it seemed
“ That though I was awake—I yet but dreamed.”
And Quong-Si scarcely dared to lift her eyes
Unto her cruel jailer. E'en her sighs
Were always punished by rough slaps and those
Atrocious words that hurt like heavy blows.
Quong-Si so struggled with her sense of right
And filial love and duty, that the sight
Of this vile wench, or of her cruel sire,
Set every fibre of her soul afire ;
Till vain her struggles grew ; each day she heard
Some wild atrocity of thought or word,
That made her loathe and dread the fiendish man,
Whose opium-bleared eyes from his sedan
Looked in at her, as she sat still and lone,
Until she found e'en *duty's* name had flown.
In vain she strove, no more would it return.
And bitter were her tears, her cheeks would burn.
Unheard of such a crime in all the land
As any maid's ignoring the command
Of her progenitor ; what e'er his rank
Or character, or habits ; she should thank
Her father, the grand Mandarin, that he
Permitted her to *live*, e'en though not free.

* * * * *

VII

So turbulent the conscience of the maid,
That when alone again, she scarce betrayed
The eagerness she felt.

Lo ! in her heart

She heard a mighty voice : "*The cruel smart
" Inflicted on Quong-Si by evil sire
" Shall be avenged ; Quong-Si, disasters dire
" Shall fall on him : cease struggling in thy heart.
" Henceforth, from his it is a thing apart.*"
Quong-Si upon the ground her forehead laid.
" Behold ! it is a god ! yet not afraid
" Is thy poor servant ; I will henceforth be,
" Child of my mother and of Chang and Thee."

Then Quong-Si took mock-money from a case
And burnt it to the gods ; did then replace
The ashes ; then with reverent hand she took
The tiny boat again.

The rose forsook

Her soft round cheek, so powerful was her fear ;
Lest some new sorrow lingered even here.

Her courage came at last which she had missed
And softly she the flimsy vellum kissed,
In rapture at the thought : " My love still lives,
" He loves me ! joy unspeakable, he gives
" Me words of comfort—ah ! I scarce can see
" The written lines, so great my ecstasy."
Unfolding, she the bamboo paper read
Such words as lovers in all times have said.

Then followed in a sadder strain these words
 (Referring, doubtless, to the peach-tree birds) :
 " Look well, the nest yon winged artist builds,
 " Some cruel robber bird shall tear away.
 " So fain must yield her hopes the affianced bride,
 " Sad and reluctant, yet the Tai-Jin's prey—"

(" Ah ! surely he is well and near to me,
 " For he has seen my bird's nest in the tree ").

Quong-Si's fond heart so trembled in her breast,
 She scarce could see, for joy, to read the rest.
 " The fluttering bird prepares a modest home,
 " In which, alas ! the spoiler soon shall dwell.
 " And thus goes forth the weeping bride, constrained ;
 " A hundred tongues the mighty triumph swell.
 " In pity mourn for the small architect ;
 " A stronger bird hath ta'en its well-loved nest,
 " And not less mourn the hapless, stolen bride,
 " How vain will be the hope to soothe her breast."

Quong-Si read on—

" As this boat sails to you,
 " There tend my thoughts to the same centre true.
 " When from the bough the willow's blossom slips,
 " And the peach-tree, fair, unfolds its rosy tips,
 " That day thy faithful Chang will sink beside
 " The lotus blooms, beneath the secret tide.
 " There mark the circles on the river smooth,
 " Widening ever (them no thing can soothe)
 " When blossoms on it fall from boughs above,
 " Broke from their parent stem, like is his love."

Such was Chang's note ; and farther down Quong-Si
 These words then saw, with heart more light and free :

"Cast thoughts upon the wave as I have done,
And I shall hear thy words, my dearest one."

VIII

Such language understood Quong-Si too well ;
And trembled as she read ; hot tears then fell
Adown her cheeks ; that self-destruction threat
She knew was wrung from anguish : quick she set
To work, Chang's melancholy notes' reply,
With many a tear, with many a moan and sigh.
Writing materials having none, she took
Her 'broidery needle, and on an ivory book,
Or tablet's leaves, she scratched her answer so
Unto her lover in the same strain ; lo,
Thus ran her answering note :

" Wise husbandmen,
" Who fear their fruits will stolen be, do then
" Straight gather them : the sunshine lengthens now,
" The vineyard fair, the fragrant orchard bough,
" Are threatened to be spoiled by stranger's hands.
" That fruit which most you prize in all the lands,
" Will gathered be when the willow blossom droops."
Much doubting if 'twould reach him, then she stoops
To place her tablets in the tiny boat,
With stick of frankincense ; then watched it float,
Thus lighted by the burning stick. Her gaze
Was fixed upon it till lost in the haze
Of night and distance ; carried from her view
Still safe and lighted. This seemed a promise true
That since disaster had not turned it o'er,
Or wind extinguished its small light, the shore

It safe would reach.

With lighter heart

Quong-Si her casement closed and sought a part
Of her embroidery she loved the best.
And while her agile fingers worked, confessed
Unto her half-formed silken flower, the hope
That newly 'gainst grim fear its strength could cope.

This maid loved well to picture all her moods,
In silken glory on the stuffs and goods
That formed the hangings draped upon the walls.
And to this day the sight of them recalls
A maiden's heart, a maiden's life and love
Bids us to know Fidelity, above
All other virtues takes precedent rank,
Revered of gods themselves ; a faithful, frank
And hopeful *love* may change the course o' things
Till e'en the clods of earth may feel their wings,
And soar to realms of *Heart*, above the *Mind*,
To view a world that *Thought* can never find.

* * * * *

Days slipped away and weeks succeeded these ;
Till Quong-Si saw, with woe, the willow trees
About to drop their withering flowers ; no more
Small boats had drifted freighted to her door.
And oft she sighed and pale she grew and wan,
While counting still the days from dawn to dawn.

* * * * *

One morn strange voices pierced her apathy ;
And preparations for some feast Quong-Si

Could note ; her active terror grew apace
When came the Mandarin with drug-bleared face,
A casket rich of Orient Jade he held,
His voice was sinister as her doom it knelled.
" I bring you, girl, some golden trinkets rare,
" And gems to glisten in your dusky hair,
" Sent by the Tai-Jin : who will come to-day
" To drink and eat with me ; and, now, I say
" That you must show more joy at sight of me,
" Nor vex me with your sullen airs, Quong-Si :
" Nor melancholy looks, nor heavy eyes,
" The Tai-Jin you shall wed, so save your sighs."
With this last sneer he left.

Quong-Si was mute,
Like to the music in the shattered lute.
A strange, cold sorrow, quenched the heart's clear fire.
" And is this death ? " she murmured. A desire
Once more Chang to behold, and then to die,
And thus the Mandarin's mandates to defy,
Engulfed her sinking heart ; as now alone,
She felt the soft, caressing breezes moan
Their tender words ; she heard the distant sound
Of servants hastening to and fro, around
The palace rooms, and from the banquet hall
Came murmuring voices ; now and then a call,
As preparations for the mighty lord
Were occupying the unnumbered horde
Of servants.

Quong-Si's dazed eyes at last then saw
The casket near her hand. As touch of thaw
In spring-time quickens all the meadow's green,
So quickened anguish, when the dazzling sheen

Of jewels pierced her sad, abstracted gaze ;
The sounds without seemed far away ; a haze
Crept o'er her senses. "Chang, my Chang," she cried,
Then slipped, unconscious, down.

The waters sighed,
The breezes still sang on, the birds still glad,
No thing in nature seemed responsive, sad
Or tender.

* * * * *

IX

While the Mandarin and Duke
Were drinking deep and deeper ; a rebuke
From unknown source seemed o'er them both to creep,
"An omen's evil wing flaps near, drink deep,"
One shouted, and they drank. Retainers went
To fetch more wine, the goblet's contents spent,
Then roamed at will ; while ever more and more
Wild jests arose.

The ceremonial o'er
Of tossing compliments from guest to host ;
Each strove the other's widest fame to boast.
They quaffed the glowing wine, until their mirth
To wildest echoes gave abnormal birth.
And feasting, drinking, revelry ran mad
Within the banquet hall, and even had
To Quong-Si's lone apartment entered, where
The gentle maid lay, still and deathly fair ;
Peace furled at last her sails, the journey done.

* * * * *

The Mandarin noted not that there came one,
Drawn thither by the merriment and light ;
To list the music and to beg a sight

Of all the glories of this regal house ;
Where greatness pleased itself with this carouse.
Who stood in the garden, asking to be almed
Of those who hurried past ; his mind he calmed
As still he stood unnoticed ; unobserved
He caught up then an outer garment, nerved
His facial muscles to a stolid stare,
Then wrapped him up, and straightway entered where
The feasting was. A screen concealed the door,
He dropped upon his knees ; along the floor,
(Scarce breathing, lest some one should notice him)
Close passed he to the merry Tai-Jin ; dim
The room he entered, then.

“ Quong-Si, my fair,”
Excitedly he whispered ; all was noiseless there.
Alone the distant banquet answer gave,
Of echoing merriment ; but, hist ! the wave
Is mounting now ; the night is growing dark,
Chang, listening, creeps along with caution ; hark !
A sigh ! yes, sure a sigh ; or such a moan
As rises when a heart dies out alone.
Chang to that sound, that bitter sound, quick flew.
And as for Quong-Si there, she never knew
Just where the agony of life went out
And left her hap’ly dead ; (beyond a doubt,
As she supposed) or when new languid hope
Awoke within her breast.

“ I dare not cope
“ With feeble strength of mine against the thought
“ That Chang is near : or am I highly wrought

"And in my fainting mind, perchance I dream.
"Ah, speak ! art thou then *real* or do but *seem*?"

"Oh, love, dear love, thy lately marble hand
"Now warms and pulses ; quickly, love, command
"Thy servant, and what e'er thou bidst me be.
"Ah, well thou knowest thy wish is law to me.
"My hope, my life, then wilt thou say farewell
"To all the tender past, ne'er more to tell
"The secret sweet of love ; when in the bowers,
"Or spicy groves, the fragile myrtle flowers,
"In blue-eyed sympathy, the story hear,
"Until a dew-drop rests there like a tear ?
"Tell me, Quong-Si, that I shall leave thy side
"And thou wilt be the Tai-Jin's beauteous bride,
"And Chang—still loving thee, will ever strive
"To be more worthy ; always he'll derive
"The good of memory, and the hope that thou
"Art happy, loved and honored : On thy brow
"The flash of rubies, and within thy heart—"

"Nay, nay, loved one, from thee I cannot part.
"Knowest thou that tiny worm we've oft-times seen,
"So smally feeble, insignificantly mean,
"Yet, dwelling on a certain kind of tree,
"It tireless weaves the richest silks ? Quong-Si,
"Oh, Chang ! upon thy breast alone can live,
"Or hope one useful moment e'er to give
"That she has been—My lord, thou art that tree,
"A lowly silk-worm is thy maid, Quong-Si."

* * * * *

X

Ah! he who separation useless deems
 Has ne'er (not even in air-castle dreams)
 Followed with eager step on absence trail;
 To watch the laggard days like shell-topped snail
 Crawl on, until at last there comes a dawn,
 With roseate glow—no more a morning wan,
 But fair and bright, when all the pain is past,
 And heart meets heart as hand meets hand at last.
 And then the eager words when no atone
 Is needed, when those dear eyes meet our own.
 Misunderstandings, petulance and pride,
 Are then but names and well may be defied.
 These lovers, in the joy reunion brought,
 Some speedy means of flying vainly sought,
 Until the maiden said, "Dear one, I think
 "The banquet hall we safe may traverse; drink
 "They who there assemble deep; ere now
 "The liquid fire has touched them on the brow.
 "Forgetful of all else, they quaff their wine,
 "And we may fly while they still sit and dine."
 These lowly spoken words Chang heard with joy
 And felt far prouder than the proud viceroy,
 Who o'er his cups was thinking of his bride;
 Nor guessed the thread was snapping, to divide
 This young life from his own.

 The bridegroom then,
 Grown maudlin o'er his wine, was dozing, when
 A shout of rage and anger roused him to
 A sense of what was passing. As he threw

A hasty glance around, yet saw no thing
Thus to arouse his host, began to sing
A rollicking and noisy ballad.

Quick,
Though staggering slightly, giving here a kick
To one tired servant sleeping ; there a blow
Upon the head, that they might surely know
Their master's wrath—the Mandarin straightway went
To Quong-Si's vacant rooms ; and then he sent
A cry of frenzied wrath ; he mightily cursed
And swore and fumed, no servant near him durst
Approach ; he howled,

“ That vile wretch has been here,
“ That puny girl is gone ! yet never fear,
“ I'll have the fellow's head and you shall take
“ The girl.” The Tai-Jin, lastly, half awake,
And partly sobered by the vehemence
Of his bride's father, gathered in a sense,
The idea vague that some one had his prize,
Stolen away beneath his very eyes.

As he sat drinking, dreaming of his love,
A fierce wild falcon swooped down and his dove
Had borne away. The Mandarin was gone
Already on the chase. The Tai-Jin, drawn
By sound of voices distancing, he ran,
Yet reeling, to the open door; began
To thunder forth a volleying command,
And deal his heavy blows on every hand.
Till wine and passion overcame his wit,
And down he crashed unconscious in a fit.

XI

Meanwhile, Quong-Si and Chang already had
 A start of their pursuers—for the lad
 Knew they were seen in passing through the hall,
 And lifting in his strong arms Quong-Si, small,
 Swift ran with her across the garden walk,
 Where oft of yore they met to read and talk,
 Then crossed the bridge, and so the Mandarin
 Lost sight of them. The dawning light was dim
 Of morning when the Mandarin returned,
 And searched Quong-Si's apartment ; thus he learned
 That they the jewels (presents to the bride)
 Had taken with them. Days passed. Far and wide
 They searched the country for the lovers young,
 The viceroy, both in pride and passion stung,
 Still sought and still was foiled; until, at last,
 E'en weeks had come and gone to join the past.
 Yet deep they laid their plans to find the pair,
 And searched the villages with fervent care :
 Sent mandates forth and spies to every place,
 That they the angered Duke should surely face.

The Mandarin being old and full of days,
 Did finally give o'er.

“ They've gone their ways,
 “ We ne'er shall find them ; so, my worthy friend,
 “ Let's think no more of this unlucky end ;
 “ But joy us in the pleasures of the drug,
 “ Nor let vexations at our heart-strings tug.”
 Not so the Duke ; still brooding o'er the lost,
 No vengeance wild but through his mind had crossed,

And ever deeper still he cursed the cause,
Poor Chang!—and ever said : “ A lucky clause
“ Have I—in that he took the rubies fine ;
“ I brought in Quong-Si's hair to gleam and shine,
“ And if, ah, if, discovered Chang may be,
“ His life shall pay the plain and simple fee.
“ Since of my bride he me has thus bereft,
“ Chang surely dies—for the great jewel theft.

“ How useless is my wealth ; for naught have I
“ With soothing power to hush the weary sigh ;
“ No riches great enough to buy content—
“ Though *all* of them my lavish hand had spent
“ To purchase one small joy—that one would be
“ The *only* one : the absent still, Quong-Si.
“ A winsome maid, half sprung from stranger race,
“ She wears a foreign beauty, in a face
“ Of mine own country women, from far land
“ She inspires my thought, my heart, I understand
“ Something intuitive ; unknown before ;
“ That now illumines thought ; aye, life, far more,
“ And breathes a knowledge in me that I see
“ A boundless universe's deep glories free.
“ Though hardened, tremulous, beside this maid
“ I'd live as ne'er before ; no whit afraid
“ The future or the past to answer to,
“ But live my life, as surely one *could* do
“ Whose vision was made clear and rarefied
“ By constant presence of so great a bride.”

And as the Tai-Jin thought o'er it, he dreamed
The maiden loved him well ; it even seemed

That Quong-Si's voice then bade him straightway cheer.
Yet ever in his dreams he still could hear
A mocking laugh that through his peace would glide ;
And, looking anxiously, he then descried
Quong-Si, the fair, the matchless maid, grow dim ;
As on to distant realms she passed from him.
Then, with a strangling cry, the Duke would choke,
As smothered in his woe, he thus awoke :
Awoke, to find his vision but delayed,
His fiery hate (dreams, but not memories, fade) ;
Awoke to find he was alone, indeed ;
And every devil in him clamored : " Speed,
" Speed us away—whence lover's bowers among
" We'll snatch the bride ! "

The earth on surely swung,
Day after day its course to East from West ;
The wheels of Time rolled on,

The Duke unblest,
Watched, evening after evening, for the spies,
Who had been sent to capture the fair prize,
With no success to tell unto their lords,
Who clinched their teeth and smote their sharpened swords,
Swearing and fuming.

Until at last one day
The Mandarin succumbed, became a prey
To grim low spirits : to ill humor turned
The Tai-Jin's passion still more fiercely burned.
Congratulating still himself that power
Was in his hands, that on the very hour
Should Chang be caught his vengeance might be proved,
By " *death for theft*," the traitor she had loved ;

The lady too—Quong-Si—he said, should die,
If still her parent's wishes she'd defy.

XII

Meanwhile, like happy birds on lightsome wing,
That only know they live to love and sing ;
Or blossoms fair, that do but live to glow,
And fanned by warming breezes blush and blow ;
So were our lovers happy now, at last,
They to the future turned.

“Ah, let the past,

“The bitter past, that held us in its hand
“And seemed about to crush us—let it stand
“Apart from this new life ; my husband, dear,
“In a sequestered place we need not fear,
“This anger of the Mandarin or Duke ;
“I am thankful, dear, that anger, not rebuke,
“But cruelty, has shut my father's heart,
“For sad, indeed, 'twould be to bear the smart
“Remorse would e'er inflict, had I caused pain ;
“E'en at the thought of it my tears would rain.
“But now, oh, Chang, to thee my life is given ;
“Thou art my all, my father, husband, Heaven.
“Bid me how best to live that I may be
“More useful, noble and more fair—to thee.”
Thus spoke Quong-Si's soft voice to Chang ; who heard
The gentle sound, and echoed every word
As lovers will—scarce knowing *what* she said,
But well content to watch the lip's deep red ;
And in respectful gaze his heart outpour,
That speech of eyes, the book of lovers' lore.

Some time ere this the hand-maid of Quong-Si
Had wedded with the gardener : glad was she
To offer shelter to her mistress dear
And Chang, the student ; yet intense her fear,
Not for herself, but for this noble youth,
The husband of her darling. For in truth
(Though silent was she), knowing Quong-Si's worth,
Her lordly father's pride, her lofty birth,
Feared that though wedded to a lowly lot,
And hidden in a far sequestered spot,
The search would e'er continue, more and more,
The mighty men would anger.

Now, Bing-Or,

The gardener, kindly, honest, simply good,
Unlike his wife, the matter understood,
As being but the quarrel of an hour.
He did not know the Duke, his wrath or power.
From humble tenement he went each morn,
To work as was his wont. An air forlorn
He then assumed, that no one seeing him
Would guess that they who sought (however dim
The hope of finding) should to his cottage turn,
With thought there of the fugitives to learn.
And daily, when Bing-Or returned, he told
The steps of the pursuers. So, though bold
As was the Tai-Jin while he them pursued,
The closest vigilance Chang could elude.
All day within the humble house they stayed,
The glare without was mellowed in the shade
Of the best room, where Quong-Si oft would rest
Her busy fingers, saying : " I am blest

"Beyond all hopes, in thee, my husband, grand,
"In youth and health and joy ; in all the land
"Are maidens, doubtless, good and fair and true,
"Who know but sorrow ; while the whole day through
"I know but bliss—they only know despair—
"And agony of grief they daily wear,
"Like iron crown, to crush the burthened head,
"And piercing woes, whence long the heart has bled."

And Chang replied

"Nay, Blossom of the Spring,
"Thou art more pure than dove on snowy wing ;
"Thy thoughts more fragrant are than lotus-blooms ;
"Thy presence is a benediction ; dooms
"All things that are not fair to steal away.
"Thou art the sun's most golden burnished ray."

Ah, surely those who *love*, will never ask
If there is charm in which a heart can bask,
In living such a life, when midst such words
Two earnest, honest hearts, like happy birds,
Their wings outspread, and soar above the skies,
Where groans of earth float up as gentle sighs.

To those who yet have never felt love's thrill,
I need not try explain such peace, until
Each suffers, too, transfixed by Eros' dart,
And then not books, but his own quivering heart,
Interpretation gives with warmth and fire,
As never pen need struggle or aspire.

XIII

Chang and his bride at nightfall wandered where
The scented garden whispered to the air
The legends and the lore that lovers know,
Those words unuttered, hearts to turn aglow.
How filled with hope their glowing future seemed !
Of wondrous visions bright their language teemed.

* * * * *

One day Bing-Or, that simple-hearted man,
Who honestly was grieved because a ban
Had been thus placed on those he hoped to see,
Established : with but half suppressed glee,
Heard that since the Mandarin was sad and ill,
He'd free forgive Quong-Si if she'd fulfil
Her father's wish and to his home return.
Bing-Or remained away all day to learn,
If possible, more of the great man's will,
And eager was his look and word until
He saw with sinking heart his grave mistake.
The news was false, he must precaution make
Or all was lost. It had been arranged that when
From any cause, discovery threatened, then,
The gardener should remain away at night
And by his absence signify the flight
Of safety.

So the burnished, burning eve
Descended on the gardener's isle to give,
Its wondrous glow to every blade and clod,
Till worm and spider thought himself a god,
That his poor habitation sudden glowed so red.
Then evening sighed, and lo, the day was dead.

XIV

Meanwhile, the gardener's trembling wife at home
Was anxiously awaiting. Forth she'd roam,
But ever as she walked, she seemed to hear
Some one receding, this increased her fear
For those within.

The evening hour was passed,
Bing-Or had not returned ; his wife then cast
A secret gaze from out her dark bamboo
And saw a shadow loitering near, then two,
Three ! four ! a dozen ! then amid her tears
She to the happy ones within, her fears
Revealed.

"I think, oh, lady dear, I see
"Dark forms that seek to hide among the tea,
"And as your slave Bing-Or has not returned,
"Surely some cause for anxiety he's learned.
"Alas ! alas ! what can thine hand-maid do ?
"No matter what it is, I'll try. For true,
"Ah, mistress dear, I am for aye to thee."

"Nay, child, fear not for us," assured Quong-Si,
"With lowly ways, no cause have we for fear ;
"Our quiet hearts shall guide us till we steer
"In peaceful inlet ; far from tempests wild,
"We'll greet each tender morn that clear and mild
"Upon us shines. Fear not ; the great and high
"Alone tempt jealous gods, not such as I,
"A simple maiden, loyal to her lord ;
"Together they may work in sweet accord,
"Ennobling effort, though the acts be small,
"While *industry* and *gentleness* are all

"That make a poor man's house a Paradise.
"I long to make their meaning my device."

And soon these loving words made Chang forget
The many dangers lowering o'er them yet.

The hand-maid listened, understanding not,
When sudden sounds were heard.

"It is some plot
"To snatch thee from me, Lotus Sweet," cried Chang.
The servant waited not, but quickly sprang
Outside the room, extinguishing the light
In passing.

Chang felt a wintry blight
Fall on his heart ; not for himself he feared,
But for his bride, whose every word endeared
Her ever more and more unto his soul,
Till only when with her, life seemed a whole,
Complete existence.

The hand-maid fastened well
The inner door. At once her keen eye fell
Upon a noisy soldier drawing near.
He paused on seeing her alone ; no tear
Showed in her eye, no pallor on her cheek,
As with a smile she asked,

"What dost thou seek ?"
The soldier read a proclamation from
The Mandarin, and then he showed how one
Who information of the pair should give
Would reap advantages. ("I scarce can live,
"So great my fear for her," the poor maid thought
While to maturity her swift plan wrought.)

She keenly watched him, gauging all she dared,
With cunning told the soldier that she shared
His views ; that surely all who could assist
In bringing Chang to justice, their chance missed,
For honest gain and duty should they shrink
From doing so— "I pray you, soldier, drink,"
She said, giving him some rice-wine in a cup.
The soldier drank. "Here, just another sup,"
The woman said.

"And also that Quong-Si
"Should be restored. I pray you, why not we
"This favor get?"

"I'm glad you're of such mind
"My pretty girl (he winked) we are not blind,
"And lately thought you knew about the pair,
"So mark you, yonder, yes, just over there,
"The guard surrounds your house on every side,
"Save where old nature holds it with the tide."
The woman shuddered, though she seemed in glee.
"'Tis well," she said, "I know as you shall see,
"But first I beg to know what price is set
"Upon this service ; what am I to get?"
"I can not tell you just how much 'twill be,
"But something worth your while, as you shall see."
"Nay!"—in apparent wrath—"right well I know
"That you would cheat me of my wages—go!"
Continuing in anger then she said,
And tossed in scorn on high her pretty head,
"I know right well the house where Chang is hid,
"Kept by a friend of mine ; I neither bid

" You stay or go, it matters not to me,
" I'll speak no word of them now, you shall see :
" For you would reap the profit and reward,
" You villain cheat ! the chance I'll not accord."
The woman's voice was raised to such a key
It echoed far and near.

 " I plainly see,"
The soldier said, " a vixen full of fight,
" But give me news and you shall have to-night
" A rich reward."

 " Nay, how shall I be sure ?
" Your *words* are likely false, framed to allure.
" But if you'll bring a paper duly signed,
" I'll guarantee the guilty ones to find :—
" But not until the papers you will bring,
" I tell you *no* ! even were you king !
" I tell you, cheat, I'll see the Duke's own hand
" Put on the paper, ere you may demand
" The news from me !"

 The soldier silent grew,
The matter weighing well, the reward was true,
And if this vixen would not tell him where
At once to go and find the truant pair,
What need to parry words ? He straight could go
Unto the Tai-Jin, fetch the papers, so
The woman have her way and he his own,
He swift resolved—and she was left alone.
But just outside the house a guard he left,
Thus of her only hope she was bereft.

XV

"The rapid river and a guard beside,
"Ah ! surely widowed is this hapless bride."

Thus ran her quick mind's anxious, frightened thought,
"In two short hours the soldier will have brought
"The written promise of reward to me !
"Alas ! alas ! unfortunate Quong-Si
"Has but a helpless maid, who cannot think
"Of one device to lead her from the brink
"Of threatening horrors !"

Within the curtained room
The trembling lovers listened to their doom,
As shouted in the brutal bartering
For written documents of reward to bring.

Thus warned of danger by the maid's loud voice,
They vainly sought some plan ; not e'en a choice
Of deaths seemed left the unhappy Chang ; at last
He calmly said :

"If I had safely passed
"The watching guard by cutting my way through
"What would become, oh, Lotus Sweet, of you ?
"I could not hope, e'en though I were not slain,
"Your beauteous face e'er to behold again,
"And though I killed them *all* and safe had flown,
"Since I could not save you, naught could atone,
"For that one act of dastard cowardice,
"That I should leave you ! dear one, quick confess,

"That thou art better pleased for me to bide
"E'en unto *death*, forever at thy side."

These words of Chang, though calm at first, soon grew
With ardor of a love naught could subdue,
And Quong Si paled ; (her thought was all for him)
Felt bitter tears her loving vision dim.

XVI

The wind, the waves, began to howl, to mount—
But lost in deepening care, Chang took no count
Of aught but dreadful plans and bitter fears.
The gardener's wife could not suppress her tears.
And time still fled on, as time must do,
Forever bearing on hearts that are true.
Or lives all false and erring. Swift he'll glide
On, ever on, and we must needs decide
In resolute haste, upon the hours of fate,
Or while we hesitate 'twill be too late.
But Chang had quickly thought the matter o'er,
When, with a steady voice, he said : "No more
"I hesitate ; there is one chance—but one—
"The river——"

"It is madness, sir, to run
"That risk ! When all is clear and birds sweet sing,
"E'en then, oh, Chang, there is danger in the thing !
"But *now* the rapid waters tear each limb
"That from the trees hangs down ; no one could swim
"In waters swollen by the early rains.
"Hark ! how its roaring torrent fiercely strains
"The strong foundations of our island home !
"Ah, better, sir, to let your brave heart roam

"Forth from its bounds beside your gentle bride,
"Than to the fierce typhoon say, '*thou decide*.'"
Thus eagerly the hand-maid spoke her thought,
But Chang again replied :

 "Although 'tis fraught
"With danger, 'tis the only path that's free—
"The noisy river—" but clingly Quong-Si
Hung on his breast and would not let him go,
But clasped him close, while weeping, "No, ah, no."

"But," said the hand-maid, "you will be butchered
Before you reach the banks, the guard will see."
But Chang his outer garment flung aside
(That badge of class distinction and the pride,
Of those aspiring for the honors fair
Of literary fame, his right to wear).

"Be of good cheer, my Lotus Flower, and I
"Will wind and wave, and flashing sword defy,
"And come again."

 "And I will constant be,
"My life, my lord, my husband, unto thee."

While Quong-Si's words vibrating sweetly rang,
Within his heart, with speed the active Chang
Leaped from the window in the seething stream.
How frightful was the struggle! Did it seem
That he would never reach that wrathful place,
The torrent's middle.

 Deathly fair the face
Of her whose anxious gaze was fixed upon
The struggling form, so swiftly outward drawn.

She clasped her hands in ecstasy of fear.
She felt no pain, though many a scarlet tear
Followed the rosy nails, imbedded in
The soft white flesh. How long it might have been
She knew not, for she seemed just then to sink
Away in total darkness, past the brink
Of consciousness.

Then tenderly the maid
Took Quong-Si's form and on the pillows laid
Her mistress fair, while, weeping in her woe,
At thought of Quong-Si's horror should she know
That Chang was drowned.

The watching servant saw
A faint blush color on the lips, the law
Of re-awakening life.

She left Quong-Si,
Quick to the window turned her eyes, but she
No sign of Chang beheld.

"Alas, the flood
"In rapid torrent bore him as a bud
"Of peach-tree blossom, helpless in the tide.
"Alas ! alas !" (she moaned) "his new made bride
"Must soon know all : say whither, cruel waves,
"Have ye then carried him ? ye should be slaves,
"Not brutal masters, hungering for the good
"In youth's fresh blossom—" while she lingering stood
And scanned the night ; each moment seemed an age,
The darkness had descended there to wage
Fierce war with wind and wave.

The hand-maid hung
Over her mistress, dreading lest the wrung

Heart of the girl would die in this great woe.
 Listen ! the officer returns ! if so,
 No more delay, no hope : how loud he knocked !
 Scarce knowing why, the hand-maid closely locked
 The door and noiseless drew the screen across,
 But with a second thought returned. "A loss
 "Is mine to-day, farewell, unconscious one,
 "Farewell, my lady good, would I could run
 "The many dangers threatening *thee* to-day
 "And thou be free and happy thence away."
 Unlocking then the door, she sadly went
 And fastened it without ; the screen she bent
 To hide the apartment from the intruder's gaze.
 Again the officer knocks ; she trembling lays
 Her hand upon the bolt, undoes the door—
 "You low-bred wench ! to keep me in the pour
 "Of rain outside ! Why this delay ?" "You ask
 "In tone too rude for answer ; 'twere a task
 "Too great for such as you to make me yawn,
 "Or speak, or even smile or sigh. Begone,
 "If you have not the paper signed all right.
 "Beware ! I'll meet you in an even fight,
 "And pluck your eyes out one by one, if you
 "Have led my hopes for ransom that's untrue."
 On seeing her in such a fiery mood,
 Though wrathful inwardly, his questions rude
 He silenced, saying :
 "Here, then, is the sign
 "The Emperor made some three days since. This wine
 "Is to my taste." The woman (though rejoiced
 To see him drink), yet acting well, she voiced

The wish that he would leave her wine and tell
For just how much her knowledge she could sell.
He told her : " Money and the Emperor's grace ; "
Then ordered her to lead him to the place
Where dwelt the couple. Then she answered : " Not
"Till late could I direct you to the spot,
" For it is early still—if we should go
"This hour he would suspect a plot, and so
"He would elude us—would this Chang, for he
"Is sharp as arrow ; wait two hours and we
"Will surely find him 'neath a humble roof—
"The stormy night gives us an ample proof.
"And we will the reward ourselves obtain,
"Nor think there's aught but money in such rain."

XVII

The officer mellowed by the strong rice wine,
Began to doze, almost to sleep—no sign
Had come from the apartment where the bride,
Lay widowed by the stern, relentless tide.

That moment when the woman heard a sound
Within the chamber, like pursuing hound,
A soldier came in haste inside the door,
" *Up, up,*"—he cried—" *The Mandarin*"—no more
Was needed, and the officer hastened out.
She heard the soldier's words ; she felt no doubt,
That Chang was drowned, and now Quong-Si would die,
Perhaps e'en thinking she had been a spy.
And while they talked outside, she slipped within.
The room was empty ! no one there ! a dim

And scarce defined sense that Chang had come
Rushed o'er her : for an instant she felt numb
And cold ; her thought a thrill of *happy* woe
As, stooping to the floor, she could surely know
Chang had returned ; his dripping foot-print still
Was warm as from his pressure on the sill ;
And listening at the window, she could hear,
Faintly, the sound of voices reach her ear.
The voice of Chang, who spoke low to Quong-Si,
As in a tiny boat they sought to flee.
What e'er she felt, poor woman, quick as thought,
She wiped the water up, and swiftly brought
The previous order to the little room,
And closed the window.

“ 'Tis a cruel doom !

“ Ne'er may I see again that lady good,
“ Who tried to lift me to the place she stood ;
“ Who is the greatest of her age and race.
“ The flowers e'en reflect her beauteous face ;
“ And I who am a stupid slave could learn
“ From her that even such as I may spurn
“ To do an action mean, think a vain thought,
“ And she is gone ! alas ! alas ! ”

She sought

In vain to soothe her sorrow till she heard,
The officer give at last the dreaded word,
To search the house. The Tai-Jin fain would know,
Since he had signed the paper, what should so
Delay the capture of the villain Chang ?
His angry, longing voice so loudly rang,

That e'en the servant pitied him that he,
Had also lost that sweetest maid—Quong-Si.
Was it her foreign parentage whose spell
Sang like the siren's charming, when e'er fell
Her gentle words, and lurked in her calm face,
With modest manner and in matchless grace?
Vainly, though eagerly, the soldiers sought,
Stealing what e'er to light that time was brought,
But naught within the gardener's house was found;
No truant Chang, no jewel. Wrathful sound
The voices as they find the search is vain,
And disappointment greets the Duke again.
The case of gems with Chang upon the boat,
Out in the storm adown the night winds float.

XVIII

Then was the gardener's house a scene of rage.
The wrath expressed would ill befit this page,
Or me to write, or you, kind friend, to read.
So surely had they counted to succeed,
That bitter were the words and oaths flew thick
For those who played on them this scurvy trick.
At last, Bing-Or, the gardener, and his wife,
Convinced them all that useless was the strife,
For they themselves had been imposed upon.
And with apparent innocence begun
Their loud regret, for all the trouble caused,
"The soldiers, officers, Mandarin—" They paused
Ere naming with *these* men the Tai-Jin, who,
Though vengeful, cruel, held a love so true

That loss of bride had changed him so that one
Not knowing cause, had doubtless said, that some
Fierce illness had his life-blood sapped away,
And thinner grew he ever day by day;
His eyes more hollow and his gait more slow.
The Mandarin protesting still—

“ I know,

“ My friend, thy pride is piqued ; forget the girl
“ She was unworthy.” But the Tai-Jin churl
Vowed vengeance pitiless on hapless Chang,
While o’er the lake his desperate curses rang.

When Chang, our hero, plunged thus headlong in
The seething waves; he staked his life to win
Her whom the gods had fore-ordained his wife,
To bear her safe away out of the strife.

At first his limbs were stiffened by the cold
Mad waters as relentlessly they rolled,
And tossed him, struggling, out into their power.
’Twas but an instant, seemed an endless hour,
Ere he could gather force to push aside
The circling, strangling arms of the fierce tide.
Then, thinking of the great risk which he ran,
In leaving Quong-Si there, he swam as man
Could only do when aided by the gods ;
And fought for life, against those frightful odds,
The elements called forth to crush his might.
Yet fiercely Chang was struggling while the night,
Seemed settling o’er the waves, though in the sky
The crimson day still glowed.

“ Ye gods ! am I

"Then giving up, must I die thus, and leave
"My darling? Nay, I almost dare believe
"That I can reach the shore."

How dark it grew !

The waves felt slimy, and the sharp winds blew,
His strength was failing fast, he feebly strove
To press the waters backward. As he dove
A slender stem he felt pass through his hand,
As sinking fast, he found he'd reached the land
And plucked a lotus flower, at the last gasp.
He struggled up the bank ; still in his grasp
He held the blossom frail, for it he knew
Had said to his despair, "Quong-Si is true."
Inspired anew with strength, given by this thought,
He shook his dripping limbs, swift ran and brought
From its safe mooring there, a light boat trim ;
Then, lest being chilled should prove to hinder him,
He swiftly ran both up and down the sward,
Then pushing off the boat he leaped on board,
And deftly plied the oar until he came,
Beneath the window, whence he swam the main.

He entered quick and lifted up Quong-Si
And bore her to the boat.

"At last we're free,

"My bride," he murmured, as he gently laid
Her unconscious form beneath the cabin ; made
A pillow of his student-robe which hung,
There by the window, just as he had flung,
It from him when he first plunged in the tide.
And thus at last Chang started with his bride.

XIX

Swift through the darkling terrors of the night,
 The little boat, like frightened bird, took flight.
 Urged swiftly on by the strong arm of Chang,
 Forward at every stroke the light bark sprang.
 Over his love he tenderly would keep
 A jealous guard, and murmured—"Fairest, sleep,
 "While onward we shall safely, surely, go,
 "Till mingling with the lake the rivers flow.
 "Sleep well, sweet flower, may gods thy slumber bless ;
 "And give me strength that every happiness,
 "Of all the earth and Heaven, may rest on thee,
 "Dear love, sweet wife, rest on, sleep well, Quong-Si."

Thus softly chanted Chang his lullaby—
 The boisterous wind sank to a gentle sigh,
 The heaving waters fierce their wrath subdued.
 Charmed listening silence, o'er the night to brood,
 The broken clouds revealed the crescent moon,
 And still she slept. Birds faintly seemed to croon
 Half startled from their rest, then slept again,
 Reserving for the sun their sweet refrain.
 While with its precious cargo, storms remote,
 Still onward glided safe the little boat,
 Into the future, whose key-note was love,
 Whose harmony had risen far above
 The discords of the noise of selfish strife,
 And found the sad, sweet minor theme in life,
 And lived its noblest phrase of melody,
 To end triumphant in the major key.
 And still the lady slept: While hanging near
 The fair new moon of love shone bright and clear.

Her lord still guided safe the drifting boat,
As o'er the tide he let his low song float.
"Sleep well, ah, fairest flower, my life, my bride,
"While gently, softly flows the whispering tide,
"The flower, the night, the zephyr breathes of thee,
"The birds that silent rest beneath the tree,
"Still in their dreams sing of thy loveliness,
"And gods draw near thy sleeping form to bless."

To Chang it seemed that o'er the night there fell
A sound of spirit voices—then a swell
Of music rose around him everywhere,
The lake, the moon, the stars, the shore, the air,
All in a chorus spoke, and of his love.
*"Behold, oh, Chang, the gods who dwell above,
"Have read thy heart ; henceforth thou shalt be named,
"BELOVED ONE OF THE GODS, and ever famed
"In all the future time the brave and true,
"In whom no terror could his LOVE subdue.
"And, furthermore, the gods also decree
"That Death's foul hand shall never fall on thee,"*

And Chang was troubled. While, as in a dream,
He answered thus :

"O, gods, auspicious seem
"The words I hear, but ye, who know my heart,
"Revoke, I pray, my doom ! I would not part
"From Quong-Si thus; e'en in the grave I still
"Would feel my dust vibrating with a thrill
"Of joy that I was near to her in death ;
"Oh, crush me not, ye mighty gods ! one breath

"Of thine can make or mar us evermore.
"Then mercy on my woe! I do implore
"That I may die that day Quong-Si's last sleep
"Shall o'er her lovely eyes in silence creep;
"Oh, powerful gods, remove thy curse from me,
"For cursed were endless life, when dead, Quong-Si."

No voice replied. Deep silence wrapped the night.
Chang, shuddering, groaned; sudden a flaming light
From out the waters leaped, and thence a dove,
Not lonely, but companioned, types of Love.
Of dazzling pureness were the perfect pair,
They slowly rose above the dark night air.
A voice sonorous spoke to Chang these words:
*"Henceforth the Dove is blessed above all birds,
"Deathless, immortal, thou shalt ever be,
"And undivided from thy bride, Quong-Si."*

And in the following stillness Quong-Si woke,
While softly to her listening lord she spoke.
"Strange things have I beheld while in a dream,
"It seemed the gods with love upon us beam,
"Bequeathing peace and endless life above."
And Chang in awe responded:
"True, my Dove."

XX.

When the first gray of early morning peeped,
Just o'er the distant mountains, lightly leaped
The little boat, borne on still rapidly
By the swift current, toward the Yang-te-Si.

The faithful boatman riveted his gaze
Along the distant river with its maze
Of craft.

Soon after daylight's gentle beam
Had glowed, with sudden swirl the swifter stream
They entered ; and their passage was less free,
More dangers threatened on the Yang-te-Si ;
The management required exertion great,
Lest the frail shallop with its precious freight,
Should in the mingling currents come to grief,
Or Chang, once seen, be hounded down as thief.

But ere the sun was two hours high, they joined
The crowds of other boats, there soon Chang coined
A jewel. Singular they ceased to be,
And now appeared as those who gladly free,
Dwell ever on the rivers breast through life.
"Who are these people living thus in strife?"
Asked Quong-Si, gazing in each passing bark,
At ugly visages all lowering dark.
And while Chang of the river life replied,
Quong-Si, moved with a pitying sorrow, sighed,
"Alas, dear one, could poverty, with *love*,
"E'er darken thus the countenance? Above
"A score of them I watch as they pass on,
"And not one face behold on which the dawn
"Of virtue, gentleness or love has shone,
"For loss of which there's nothing can atone."
And then Quong-Si was silent, watching still,
Those taking yearly tribute up (to fill

His Imperial Majesty's rich treasury)
Of salt and rice ; more thoughtful grew Quong-Si,
And silent mused in higher atmosphere
The deeper things of life now grand and clear.

XXI

A passing boatman Chang at noontime hailed,
As slowly past the pretty bark he sailed :
" Well, friend, the day is fine and I would fain
" My parching lips should speak with wine again.
" A jewel I have found, of just what worth
" I do not know, but as there is a dearth
" Of jewels here ; why, I will sell the thing,
" If it the price of food and drink will bring ;
" If not—I'll keep it still, for I am told
" Gems bring big prices, certain places sold."
The boatman eagerly the ruby took
And gave a coin ; without a second look
Chang plied his oar, away they sped along
Until they joined the thickest of the throng.
A pretty boat was theirs. The prow was formed
Like to a bird ; the cabin, how e'er stormed,
Was still secure, and finely cushioned, too,
And hung with silken curtains, bright and new.

A fitting nook for such a lovely bride ;
Chang, happy sentinel, kept watch outside.

While curious eyes oft sought to pierce within
The cabin's precincts. Through the curtains thin,
The soft air kissed her brow, while she beheld
Her husband-lover, and her bosom swelled

With love and girlish pride, that Chang should be
Hers evermore. Ah ! blissful revery !

From boatmen passing nea Chang purchased food,
And sold some trifling jewel. To elude
All curious folk he could not, yet all knew
'Twere wiser not to question or pursue
The subject of his silence. Quong Si's heart
Had found its haven, and she muse'd apart.

Thus floating onward went the happy bride,
In Chang's light boat, upon the gentle tide;
Thus floating onward toward the open sea
Of deepening, widening thought, which grandly free,
Had changed their lives from common paths to these
Of heroes, sailing the eternal seas.
Thus passed the boat adown the drifting tide,
While still they silent mused.

Then to his bride

Spoke Chang : " We do approach the place where these,
" Who wish to pass beyond, must needs disclose
" From whence they come, and whither they would go,
" And by what right, and who they are, and so
" I ask thee, guided by the gods, tell what
" To say and do ? " (then answered she) " Yon spot
" Which silver gleams beneath the setting sun,
" That is our home : The journey now is done ;
" Ethereal voices whisper me to roam
" No more : Henceforth that is our island home."

While following the gaze of his young bride,
Chang, lowering his voice, in awe replied :

"Quong-Si, the gods who gave thee unto me,
"Have showed me that our home shall surely be
"Upon an island, where the birds shall sing
"And with each happy morn, new cadence bring :
"And we alone shall own that blessed isle,
"Where prosperous nature lavishly doth smile."
E'en as they spoke, the little boat, *uncaused*
'Gainst the resisting waters, surely paused.

With bounding heart, Chang stepped upon the shore,
Within his clasp he held Quong-Si. "'Tis o'er,
"Our voyage, Lotus, we have come at last
"Unto the place of rest ; the day is past.
"I'll draw the boat ashore, then lay thee down
"And sleep. Fear naught ; behold the moon doth crown
"The night ; and I will watch thy peaceful rest
"And praise the gods, for we are ever blest."

XXII

And when the moon rose high, the silvered wave
Seemed with tender, tinkling touch the boat to lave,
Then reverently Chang viewed the islet o'er,
The north, the south, from east to west ; each shore
More fertile and more beautiful appeared,
As lofty dreams on happy thoughts he reared.

A solitary island thickly set
With fragrant shrubs and flowers, all dripping wet,
With glistening dew, and murmurous with life.
Just when the morning broke Chang took his knife
And thrust it in a tree, while thus he spake :
"Here will I found my house ; and here will make

"A dwelling fit and worthy for Quong-Si ;
"Here, where my knife blade quivers in this tree."
He gathered then a fragrant wreath of blooms
And to his wife returned. The water croons
A chant of rest ; upon her youthful brow
He placed the flowers, and with a lover's vow
Upon his lips he slept and was refreshed.

Like warp and woof tunefully intermeshed
In one bright fabric ; so at dawn the birds,
Upon the island fair, poured forth such words
As, had we *Siegfried's* gift, we glad would hear ;
Not knowing birdling languages, they cheer
The sorrow heart. And oh ! the heart of joy
They visit with a peace that cannot cloy.

The first of morning's zephyrs, come with dawn,
Awoke Quong-Si to her new life. Upon
Her brow she found a chaplet of fresh flowers.
She quickly rose and flitting midst the bowers
Plucked thence a nosegay for her lord's delight,
Whose noble form in its abandon might,
In sleep was stretched beside the boat, where he
Might guard the gentle slumbers of Quong-Si.

•

She soon returned and trembling stooped to press
With dewy lips his forehead. The caress
Awakened him and springing up, he cried:
"My Lotus Flower, no blessing is denied.
"Our home is here. This island is our realm.
"The gods themselves have touched our drifting helm,

"And brought our boat unto this haven good,
"Here I will work, dear heart, for daily food;
"Twill sweeter be that we are thus alone ;
"No light regret, no sigh, no tear, no moan
"Shall cross thy heart, or soul, thy eye, thy lip,
"From love's deep draught thou evermore shall dip
"And drink, and I will ever give to thee,
"Anew each day, my love, my life, Quong-Si."
Then hand in hand they hastened to the place,
Where in the tree the knife was thrust. Her face
Quong-Si turned toward him, radiant with love,
While golden rays shone on them from above.

With her own hands Quong-Si then helped Chang build
A modest dwelling. The land around he tilled,
The winged hours, and days, and weeks swift fled,
And Chang more thoughtful grew. One day he said :
"A plan is in my mind to-day, Quong-Si,
"We dwell upon this isle, yet are not *free*
"To do so. I will, therefore, in our boat
"Go to yon town ; it is not so remote,
"But I can come again ere day is done.
"And with the jewels I can purchase, from
"The owner of this island, a free right
"Unto it henceforth. We may rest to-night
"On our own land."

Then tender farewells came
And gentle sighs and many a loving name,
Ere Chang at last pushed off the little bark
Which from the shore Quong-Si watched till a dark,
Wee speck it seemed upon the shining tide,
Which still was large enough her thoughts to guide.

Then busied in her home, that Chang might find,
On his return, all suited to his mind.
When on its funeral-pyre, the sunset burned
The sentient clouds, her faithful lord returned,
With silks to furnish her, as she had need,
And food, and implements, and garden seed.

XXIII

Thus, happily, with *Industry* and *Love*,
Enjoying richest blessings from above,
The island yearly more in value grew ;
While Chang was still the same, his love as true
And faithful ; and Quong-Si, his gentle wife,
More lovely waxed, while sounds of childish life
Rang in sweet cadence on the island air,
To bless the love of this most happy pair.

The cultivation of the island brought
A modest fortune. Also, Chang was sought
Throughout the province for his wisdom sound,
And on his name great honor did redound,
And still he labored on in the same way,
And ever tilled the earth from day to day.

* * * * *

The gentle years passed gently o'er the isle ;
Their children all were grown.

Quong-Si would smile

To see these stalwart men above her tower,
And mark their nobleness, and see the power
In neighboring provinces they, too, possess,
While, with her tender voice, she'd say : " Confess

"You are my babes, the little ones who came
"Unto our isle. Are ye, indeed, the same?
"As tall as trees, as strong as yonder tide;
"Ah, tell me, Chang, am I the very bride
"Floated away in thy small boat at night?"
"Indeed, thou art, Quong-Si; Time's awful blight
"Has passed thee by, and fairer thou art now,
"Than when I gazed on thee from o'er the prow
"Of our small bark."

Again the island home
Holds but the wedded pair; their children roam
Afar and honors gain, yet ne'er forget
The silver isle in sparkling waters set.

XXIV

Quong-Si once said to Chang:

"Dost thou not think
"That one who finds sweet waters good to drink,
"And knows of thirsty souls, should he not tell,
"To all who need, where they may find such well?"
"Indeed, sweet flower, thou knowest well my mind,
"What use were it if one *alone* should find
"Such fountain? Let him give it to all men."
"'Tis even so, my lord, so must *thou*, then,
"A book on agriculture give the world,
"For thy great knowledge of the land, unfurled
"Will be a banner, blest by freemen all,
"Who 'neath the load of ignorance now fall."
Thus spoke his wife, and gently watching her,
He found her words within his breast to stir
The first life breathings of an unborn deed,
The very work of which his soul had need.

Together, in a cosy shaded nook,
Chang and his wife planned thus the coming book :
" A book 't must be to help lift off the load
" Of blind-eyed labor—point the better road ;
" A book 't must be to help the young and brave.
" And to encourage, too, the aged slave ;
" To point out virtue and a love of good,
" In language that might well be understood.
" To teach a reverence for e'en the sod ;
" And show that by each stone there stands a god ! "

" Dear wife," said Chang, " thy words have touched the place
" That empty was ; I long have seen the face
" Of some strange duty, as yet unrecognized ;
" Now, at thy word, I see it measured, sized
" And mapped out to my hand ; I see my work,
" Nor seek from now its accomplishment to shirk ;
" My life has ever been for thee alone,
" Now for my brother man, and so atone
" For aught of selfishness my love becomes,
" Lest narrowness of love my power numbs,
" And makes me still less worthy of thy love,
" That great, peculiar blessing, sacred Dove."
And as time passed, Chang's work with ardor grew,
And whatsoe'er by experience he knew
He put it in his book, for all his race.
His inspiration was Quong-Si's sweet face,
As hovering near him, silently she worked
On lustrous silks, while in her eyes there lurked
That smile of love, and interest, and hope ;
'Gainst which the years all vainly tried to cope.

It almost seemed that they had both returned
Unto that first sweet hour, when they had learned
Of mutual love, in the far-off, dark days,
Ere Psyche lighted bright their diverse ways,
Giving this never ending joy and peace,
This hope, this love, this comfort ; and the lease
Of endless youth and usefulness. Each morn
That brightly came in turn, new pleasures born
Of every hour. The self-set task increased ;—
New meanings to the drudgery, as such it ceased,
No more existing, but as a blessed part
Of the sweet mystery of life and heart.

Until, at last, some seven years had fled—
The book was finished ; and the people read
With joy and interest ; while the name of Chang
Throughout the great Celestial Empire rang.
Then from all sides great honors showered on him ;
Yet all were pale and lustreless and dim
Beside the joy and pride of dear Quong-Si,
Which raised Chang's soul to peaceful ecstasy.
But Chang (like other authors, small or great)
Had by his book forever sealed his fate.
Whoever would be warned by one who knows,
Take my advice ; let neither verse, nor prose,
Nor *any* fickle jade, however fair,
Of making *any* book your soul ensnare !
For there is mischief in it, soon or late,
Your luckless pen will curse your luckless fate :
Your palsied hand, your scattered wits, will prove
How merciless the mistress is, you serve.

"Fair Literature" in every age is sung :
 Look at the gibbets ! there the hosts are hung
 Who gave their lives, that they might starve for her,
 Were drawn, quartered, and hung without demur.
 So, brave young authors, who are not afraid,
 I beg you, for your own sakes, change your trade ;
 And rather till the land as Chang has done,
 Than bear upon your brows the laurels won ;
 Or else, like Chang, from whence you do not look,
 You'll be in trouble, if you write a book.

XXV

So heaped with honor, and renown, and fame,
 His reputation carried far Chang's name.
 And though it brought him friends both high and low,
 It also had revealed him to his foe :—
 That mighty TAI-JIN ! long, long years defied,
 Since Chang had vanished with *his* bartered bride.
 Long years ago the Mandarin was dead.

While, year by year, the Tai-Jin's passion fed
 Upon revenge ; he *would not* die, till he
 Had severed Chang by death from his Quong-Si.
 So, with demoniacal laughter, rose
 The aged Tai-Jin ; though would to none disclose
 The purpose of his journey.

Straight he went
 Unto the river-station, whence he sent
 His oath to the military Mandarin,
 That Chang had stolen his jewels, and that sin
 Is payable by death. Escorted, he
 Went to the isle, instructing them : " Quong-Si

"Seize and bring to me ; and the villain Chang
"Slay without mercy ; he's been the serpent fang
"That's poisoned all my life ; his latest breath
"Shall shudder at my name, and by his death
"I'll free me from this all-corroding woe,
"Which eats my heart with fatal pang, though slow."

Meanwhile, how wondrous fair a morning broke
About the isle ; the tuneful birdlings woke
To the caressing air, and to its sighs,
In sweetest trilling themes, made soft replies ;
The flowery land was blossomed o'er, and seemed
The paradise of which one may have dreamed.
Such was the island home ; the rippling tide
Surrounding it, as slowly, side by side,
Wandering through the garden, soft and low
The lovers murmured, with a constant flow
Of thought, which, interchanged, seems new and grand ;
While, with a loving pressure, hand clasped hand.
"Thus, looking back, I can remember still,
"The very sense of peace, which, like a thrill
"Of new-found safety, came into my heart
"When first I gazed on thee, musing apart
"In the old garden 'neath the sheltering trees.
"How strangely murmurous sighed the evening breeze.
"How beautiful, dear Lotus, are *these* years !
"How far removed from old-time doubts and fears ;
"Thy beauty, and thy wisdom, and thy smile,
"Have made a paradise of our home isle."

Such were the loving sounds the Tai-Jin heard,
As secretly he listened to each word,

And with dark face and hate-clenched hand he crept
Beneath the shrubs and close concealment kept.
At length, with tender kiss of brief good-bye,
The lovers parted ; Chang to his farm drew nigh,
While Quong-Si, busied with her household, spent
The time in useful work and sweet content.

Scarce had Chang reached the newly-furrowed field,
Than to an impulse strange he could but yield.
“ Quong-Si,” he cried, “ dear, I return to thee—
“ I have a strange desire thy face to see.
“ Though scarce the shadows moved since I thee clasped.”
These hurried, choking words Chang almost gasped.
Then as his wife he circled with his arm,
He passionately kissed her brow. “ No harm
“ Can reach us, oh, my lord, while we exist
“ Enfolded in each other's arms, but, list !—
“ I know not what yon murmuring noise doth mean,
“ Oh, Chang ! a dark face which I've surely seen,
“ Peers through the bamboo ! 'Tis the Duke I see !”
Quick springing forward, Chang then pressed his knee
Against the frail bamboo to hold it closed.
The entrance of the Duke he thus opposed.
The Duke (who, maddened by his jealous rage,
Was in a frenzy) wildly spoke : “ A cage
“ You're in, my pretty bird, my bride, Quong-Si,
“ For *mine* you are and evermore *shall* be !
“ I've waited for my bridal many a year ;
“ I've waited for revenge ; without a fear
“ But it would come, and it has come to-day,
“ And Chang the insult with his life must pay.”

(Quong-Si rushed forward, clasped her husband's arm.)

"Together we are fearless, and a charm

"The gods have placed forever on Chang's life,

"Also on me, his loving, faithful wife :

"Then do thy worst ; fear not for us, oh, Duke,

"But for thyself ; remorse's dire rebuke—

"No malice do we bear thee : go thy way,

"And of the gods forgiveness we will pray ;

"Then for thine own sake, not for ours, swift leave

"Our island home ; and we will free forgive."

Quong-Si's ennobling words but added to

His bitter rage ; and splintering the bamboo,

With dash of sword, he stabbed Chang in the breast ;

The blood gushed forth—"and so his life is blest?"

Sneered with wild laugh the Tai-Jin, as Chang fell,

"'Tis not a parting, 'tis but a brief farewell,"

In fainting tones Chang thus to Quong-Si spoke,

And o'er his dying face a smile then broke ;

Which lighted up the shadows of the room,

Like sun-light rising o'er a night of gloom.

Quong-Si in horror gazed, kissed the pale brow,

Then fled to her own room, whispering a vow

Of endless love—swiftly she made a pyre

That she might join Chang's spirit.

Quick set fire

To all the silken curtains.

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From the shore

Spectators viewed the blazing house ; then more

Like rosy cloud than smoke it seemed to grow,

And soared just o'er the tree-tops ; as a glow

Of golden radiance from its depth revealed
The spotless pledge of love the gods had sealed ;
And upward sailed the cloud of pearly white ;
With roseate tints like lotus-petals bright,
While, backward, from the central rays of gold,
A filmy mist-like gauze seemed to unfold,
And thus disclosed a white, immortal dove,
Companioned by its mate, THE TYPE OF LOVE.

The powerful gods had blessed that constancy
Of noble Chang, of loveliest Quong-Si,
Which rendered sweet to them life's every breath,
And undivided in the hour of death.

And while in awe and wonder crowds amazed,
From distant shore upon the vision gazed,
A murmur musical 'rose on every side,
Then o'er the mystic island flowed the tide.
The silver tide closing the isle from sight,
But, lightly listening to its chant at night,
Its song is heard to be of endless Love,
And of a hero, blessed of gods above ;
And in its tender tone, the trembling tide,
Still tells the legend of the mystic bride ;
How Love had rendered sweet life's every breath
Triumphant, undivided, still in Death.

THE END.

NOTE.

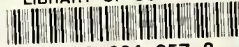
Thus have I dreamed in childhood, of the fate
Of those queer people on the old blue plate ;
And such my fancy, as e'en now I gaze
Upon the pictures 'neath the China's glaze.

A lofty house upon the right appears,
Its stately walls amid tall trees it rears ;
And on these trees, strange blossoms grow, odd fruits,
Which (to my fancy) this same legend suits.
A tiny bridge, with people on we see,
('Twas counting them I first learned "up to" three) ;
A cottage small (the gardener's let's suppose),
A large white lake (Chang's fleeing to oppose),
A pretty boat—and then a tiny isle ;
And two huge birds, which oft provoke a smile.
Such is the picture ; all in bright blue paint,
Which thrills me with its ideas, odd and quaint,
And lent to childhood's wonders its full share,
On Grandmamma's old "*plain blue Willow Ware*."

NOTE.

The Author acknowledges indebtedness to stray leaves of an old magazine for the letters in Cantos VII and VIII.

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